

New York State Department of Health
AIDS Institute
HIV Guidelines Program
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Living Well

with HIV:

*Taking Care of Your
Emotional Health*



Where can I get more information about HIV/AIDS?

- New York State Department of Health HIV/AIDS Information Line
All calls are private and free
English: 1-800-541-AIDS
Spanish: 1-800-233-SIDA
HIV/AIDS TTY/TTD Information Line:
1-212-925-9560
Voice callers use the NY relay:
711 or 1-800-421-1220 and ask the operator for: 1-212-925-9560
- New York City Department of Health HIV/AIDS Hotline
Open Monday – Saturday, 9 am – 9 pm
English and Spanish: 1-800-TALK-HIV

This listing of agencies offering help and information for people suffering from emotional or mental health problems was put together by the New York State Department of Health, AIDS Institute, Office of the Medical Director. There are many other places that offer these kinds of services. This list does not constitute an endorsement of the services provided by these agencies.

What is emotional health?

Emotional health is the way your thoughts, feelings, and behaviors affect your life. Being emotionally healthy leads to positive self-image and in turn, satisfying relationships with friends and others. Being in good emotional health helps you deal with life's challenges at home, work, or school.

An upset in your emotional health can create more and more problems. Being emotionally unwell often causes difficulty in dealing with everyday demands, affecting how you think, feel, and relate to others.

How common are emotional problems?

Very common! About 1 in 5 adults in the United States experience a problem with their emotional health at some point in their life. These problems can affect people of any age, race, and religion. These problems are NOT caused by personal weakness or lack of character.

Common Symptoms of Emotional Problems

Below are some common symptoms experienced when one is having emotional problems. Sometimes these symptoms can occur even if you do not have a specific emotional problem. If the symptoms don't go away within two weeks, or if you think they are more serious than just a reaction to something, ask your doctor or case manager for help.

Do you feel:

Sad, blue, down in the dumps, or hopeless?
Nervous, worried, or anxious?
Guilty, worthless, or helpless?
More tired than usual?
More irritable than usual?
More restless than usual?

Do you have:

Mood swings?
Nightmares or other problems sleeping?
Trouble concentrating or remembering things?
Outbursts of anger?
Fears about leaving your home because you don't want others to learn that you have HIV/AIDS?
Thoughts of death or wanting to hurt yourself?
Fears about death and dying?

Have you noticed:

Changes in your appetite or weight?
You don't want to spend as much time with other people as usual?
You have lost interest in activities you once enjoyed?

If you have any of the feelings on this list and they don't get better on their own within two weeks, seek help from a health professional.

Who can help me find emotional health services?

- Your primary care provider
- New York State Office of Mental Health (NYS OMH)
This service provides information and referrals for finding help for emotional health problems. It is not an emergency or suicide hotline.
Open Monday – Friday, 9 am – 4 pm
1-800-597-8481; 1-800-597-9810 (TDD)

Where can I get more information about emotional health problems?

- National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH)
1-866-615 NIMH(6464)
<http://www.nimh.nih.gov>
- National Alliance for the Mentally Ill (NAMI)
1-800-950-NAMI (6264)
<http://www.nami.org>
- National Mental Health Association (NMHA)
1-800-969-NMHA (6642)
<http://www.nmha.org>
- Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance (DBSA)
1-800-826-3632
<http://www.dbsalliance.org>
- American Psychological Association Help Center
1-800-964-2000
<http://www.helping.apa.org>
- National Mental Health Information Center
1-800-789-2647; 1-866-889-2647 (TDD)
<http://store.mentalhealth.org>
- If you do not have Internet access, try your local library. Most libraries have computers with Internet access that you can use for free, and they can show you what to do if you need help. Librarians are not required to keep your HIV or health information private, but you do not need to tell them what information you are looking for or which websites you plan to view.

FINDING HELP

What should I do if I have an emotional health emergency?

- Go to an emergency room or call 911 right away if you feel you might hurt yourself or someone else.
- Call the 24-hour emergency number for your health care provider or clinic. If you have to leave a message, be sure to say you need help right away. If they cannot help you at that time, they may tell you to call 911 or will call 911 for you.
- Call LifeNet, a New York City organization that helps people in crisis by giving information and phone numbers for places to find help. LifeNet is staffed 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

English:

1-800-LIFENET (1-800-543-3638)

Spanish:

1-877-AYUDESE (1-877-298-3373)

Chinese and Korean:

1-877-990-8585

Hearing Impaired (TTY):

1-212-982-5284

Other languages:

1-800-LIFENET, and ask for an interpreter

- Call the National Hope Line Network (suicide hotline): Highly trained crisis line workers will connect you to the certified crisis center closest to you. 1-800-SUICIDE (1-800-784-2433)
- Contact the New York City Helpline: New York City's oldest non-profit crisis and suicide hotline responds to crises and provides useful information and referrals. 212-532-2400

Are emotional health problems treatable?

Yes! Emotional health problems are similar to other health problems and can be treated, allowing you to feel better. Treatment may involve getting counseling, taking medication, or both.

If you broke your leg, you wouldn't let it go untreated. Often however, emotional health problems are ignored, thinking that you will "snap out of it" or that it is something to be ashamed of. That kind of thinking prevents people from getting the help they need.

Sometimes people don't get the help they need because they don't know where to turn. When you're not feeling well, it can be a struggle to take the necessary steps to help yourself get better. When dealing with emotional health problems, it's important not to handle them alone. Healing is a combination of helping yourself and letting others help you. Support, information, advice, and professional treatment are all forms of help.





Why are people with HIV at risk for emotional health problems?

- **Stress.** People living with HIV face unique challenges, some of which may be very stressful. Stress can trigger emotional health problems. It can also make it harder to cope with existing health problems.

Events which may trigger emotional health problems for people living with HIV:

- Finding out that you have HIV
- Telling other people that you have HIV
- Starting to take medication or changing medications
- Getting sick or being hospitalized
- Learning that your HIV is getting worse
- Dealing with end-of-life decisions
- Death or loss of a loved one

Tip: You can help to reduce stress due to some of the above situations by making a plan. Take some time to think about how to disclose your status to others or what you can do to prevent spreading the virus to others. Ask your health care provider or case manager to help you plan how you will deal with these situations when they arise. It is always best to be prepared!

- **HIV disease.** HIV disease can cause changes in your brain and body that may bring about emotional problems. These can be serious and require medical attention. Emotional health problems can cause changes in mood, problems with concentration and thinking, or both.

What benefits can I expect from treatment?

- Symptom relief, such as improved sleep patterns and less worrying
- Better physical health and overall functioning, including higher energy level
- Improvement in the way you take your HIV medications
- Relief due to the realization that your symptoms are due to a medical problem, not a personal weakness
- Increased concentration and productivity at work and in your personal life.

What can I do to stay in good emotional health?

- Get plenty of sleep
- Exercise
- Eat a balanced diet
- Maintain relationships with friends and family
- Avoid or cut down on drugs, alcohol, and tobacco
- Take medications as prescribed
- Take steps to reduce the risk of passing HIV to others
- Get involved in your community
- Schedule and keep regular appointments with your health providers
- Talk to someone and seek help early if you are feeling overly stressed
- Engage in some type of relaxation activity, like walking or listening to music, and incorporate it into your day



How do I get help with emotional or mental health problems?

- Talk to your health care provider, such as your doctor, nurse practitioner, physician's assistant, social worker, or case manager.
- See a mental health professional.
 - Psychologists, licensed professional counselors, and clinical social workers provide counseling.
 - Psychiatrists are licensed doctors and can prescribe medication; sometimes they provide counseling, too. Often they work with psychologists and social workers so you can receive the combination of treatment options you need.
- Check your health insurance. Most insurance plans, including Medicaid and ADAP, cover emotional and mental health care. If you don't have insurance, many health centers will arrange a sliding scale payment program so you can pay according to your income.
- Seek support from family or friends. Choose a family member or friend that you trust and decide what information you want to share. Have a conversation in person rather than a phone conversation if possible. Discuss your current concerns and plans for seeking care. If you feel uncomfortable going to a mental health professional or the emergency room alone, ask this person if he/she will come with you.

Why is it especially important for people with HIV to receive treatment for emotional health problems?

- **Quality of life.** When you are emotionally healthy, you feel better able to meet life's demands, cope with problems, and handle stress.
- **Self-care.** People who are emotionally unwell often have a hard time sticking to schedules. When you are trying to cope with an emotional health problem, you are more likely to:
 - miss doctor's appointments
 - forget to pick up medicine at the pharmacy
 - forget to take medications
 - forget to eat healthy foods
- **Safety.** People who are trying to cope with emotional distress are more likely to take risks with their health, such as using excessive amounts of drugs and alcohol or having unsafe sex. This may lead to passing the virus to others unintentionally or to getting infected with other sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) or other strains of HIV.
- **Overall health.** Emotional wellness is as important as physical health. In fact, several studies have noted that when emotional problems are treated, illnesses such as heart disease, diabetes, and HIV/AIDS substantially improve.

What is the difference between emotional problems and mental health disorders?

A mental health disorder is a more serious type of emotional health problem. When the common symptoms of emotional problems are more persistent, frequent or severe or include other more unusual symptoms, they may indicate the presence of a mental health disorder. On the following pages is a sample of mental health disorders and their symptoms. Only a mental health professional can diagnose mental health disorders. Speak with your doctor or a mental health professional if you are concerned that you may have a mental health disorder.

Mental Health Disorders & Symptoms

Depression

- Sadness
- Loss of interest or pleasure in activities that you once enjoyed
- Feelings of guilt or worthlessness
- Thoughts of death or suicide
- Trouble falling asleep or staying asleep; sleeping too much
- Changes in appetite
- Major changes in body weight
- Fatigue or a lack of energy
- Restlessness or irritability

Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)

(caused by a traumatic event, such as a car accident, rape, natural disaster, child abuse, or domestic violence)

- Problems sleeping
- Recurring nightmares
- Irritability
- Feeling detached or numb
- Avoiding situations which remind you of the event
- Being easily startled
- Outbursts of anger
- Anxiety

Anxiety Disorders

- Excessive worry
- Nervousness which prevents you from being able to do daily activities
- Fear about death and dying
- Fear of being rejected by loved ones
- Fear of being left alone



Bipolar Disorder

- Big mood swings from extreme happiness to extreme sadness and back again
- Changes in energy level and behavior accompanying mood swings
- Extreme irritability
- Trouble concentrating

Schizophrenia

- Hearing voices or seeing things that aren't really there (hallucinations)
- Strange beliefs that are not based on reality (delusions)
- Fear that others are plotting against you (paranoia)
- Trouble thinking clearly, being confused easily
- Difficulty concentrating
- Social withdrawal